

ARCTIC COLLEGE: THE DEVELOPMENT OF A TERRITORIAL  
COLLEGE SYSTEM

During May of 1981 the Executive Council of the Government of the N.W.T. approved a policy which established the Adult Vocational Training Centre of Fort Smith as a College. In doing so, the Executive Council approved the principle of a College system for the Northwest Territories. Since that time a number of actions have occurred which have refined this policy and have caused the creation of a second campus of the college system located in the Eastern Arctic at Frobisher Bay.

This presentation examines these important developments. It details the political and educational climate which contributed to the decision. In addition it examines some of the issues now facing the Board of Governors and staff of the Arctic College.

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# ARCTIC COLLEGE: THE DEVELOPMENT OF A TERRITORIAL COLLEGE SYSTEM

## I. INTRODUCTION

### A) Purpose

During May of 1981 the Executive Council of the Government of the N.W.T. approved a policy which established the Adult Vocational Training Centre, located at Fort Smith, as a College. In doing so, the Executive Council approved the principle of a college system for the Northwest Territories. Since this landmark decision, a number of actions have occurred which have refined this policy and have caused the creation of a second campus of the college system located at Frobisher Bay.

During this presentation the development of a college system in the N.W.T. will be examined. First, I will review the Arctic College concept. Second, previous government training strategies will be identified. Third, political actions which have resulted in the advancement of the Arctic College concept will be discussed. Finally I would like to touch briefly on the issues now facing the college system.

## II. THE ARCTIC COLLEGE CONCEPT

The proposal for the creation of an Arctic College system was presented by the Northwest Territories' Legislative Assembly Special Committee on Education. Formed in 1980 and composed





of five M.L.A.s from across the N.W.T., the committee and its staff spent two years examining the education systems of the N.W.T. The study included extensive research as well as public submissions and hearing.

Their final report titled, Learning Tradition and Change in the Northwest Territories was submitted in March of 1981. It contained forty-nine (49) recommendations. Included were recommendations which proposed the creation of an Arctic College system.

The committee envisaged a decentralized College System with campuses throughout the N.W.T. The system was to be established through legislation and was to operate at "Arms Length" from the Government. The proposal was backed by draft legislation indicating practical applications of the committee's proposals.

Since the submission of the Special Committee on Education's report considerable analysis and assessment of its recommendations have been carried out. While the form and mandate of the Arctic College, as proposed by the Special Committee, have been altered somewhat, specific policy decisions have been made by the Executive Council of the Government of the N.W.T. to implement the committee's thoughts and create the Arctic College.





The Executive Council has established a mandate for the Arctic College through policy decisions. While general in nature, it gives the authority for instructional delivery in the following areas:

- Trades Theory courses
- Pre-Employment courses
- University transfer courses
- Cultural programs
- Academic and preparatory programs
- General interest courses

Currently two campuses have been established, these are located in Fort Smith and Frobisher Bay.

In addition, specific emphasis has been placed on the delivery of college programming through the use of distance education methods as well as on an extension basis.

Currently the college is directed by a Board of Governors. Appointed by the Minister of Education, the Board provides policy direction for the President. As the Board is currently a matter of Territorial policy and as the College remains, at this time, a program of the Government of the N.W.T., the degree of Board influence is generally limited to the establishment of operational policy. The approval of legislation is expected to more explicitly detail powers of the Board of Governors.





Close cooperation between the Minister's staff, particularly the Assistant Deputy Minister of Advanced Education, the senior college administration and the Board of Governors has been effective in determining the developmental priorities of the college system

### III HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: Factors Influencing the Development of the Arctic College

By recommending a decentralized delivery system, the Arctic College proposal marked a significant change to the adult training strategy for the N.W.T. While community adult education had, historically, been community based, adult and college training was, for the most part, delivered through central institutions. To assess the training strategies which served the residents of the N.W.T. during the past fifteen years one must look at both Federal and Territorial programs.

#### A) Federal Government - Training Strategies

While acknowledging the establishment and mandate of the N.W.T. Department of Education and providing the funding for it's programs, the Federal Government, or more specifically, the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, maintained an active role in providing native northerners with avenues to southern College programs. Throughout the





1970's, the Vocational Training Section of D.I.A.N.D. provided opportunity and support in a wide variety of training fields. The Vocational Training Section offered counselling services, transportation and accommodation assistance as well as arrangements for training allowances. For the most part, training was provided in southern institutions. Over the past three years the activities of this section have been reduced.

B) Government of the N.W.T. - Training Strategies

The Northwest Territories Government has during the past fifteen years, promoted two distinct programs to assist northerners to attend post secondary education. The first program included student financial assistance in the form of grants, loans and bursaries. Under the program guidelines northerners were able to secure financial assistance to attend post secondary programs throughout Canada. The program was supported by a counselling office located in Edmonton (Alberta). While providing financial assistance, the program had limited success in encouraging native northerners to participate in southern college and university programs. Poor student preparation and the remote nature of the counselling officer were two factors which limited the program's success.





It should be noted that this program was revised in 1982 and still remains available for qualifying northerners who wish to seek post secondary education in the N.W.T. or elsewhere in Canada.

The second, and for the purposes of this discussion, more important effort to provide training in the north, was the creation of the Territorial training centre.

Created in 1968 and located in the town of Fort Smith, just north of the Alberta-Northwest Territories border, the Adult Vocational Training Centre (AVTC) initially hosted a Heavy Equipment Operator training program. However, the quantity of programs offered expanded steadily throughout the 1970's. Vocational programs in the fields of mechanics, carpentry and trades theory were added. Teacher Education, Certified Nursing Assistant, Secretarial and academic programs were also included. By 1976 student enrollment had reached 194. Enrollment continued to rise to 308 students by 1980.

Although the Teacher Education program had been initiated in 1968, it was not until the mid-1970's that the focus of programming began to shift away from vocational skills training. The implementation of the Renewable Resources Technology Program (1978) marked a shift to increased





*2 year*  
emphasis on diploma programs. This trend has continued with the development of the Social Services and Public and Business Administration Programs in 1982.

As AVTC approached college status there was increasing public agitation for an assessment of the effectiveness of the centralized training model. Concerns were voiced, particularly by residents of the Eastern Arctic, that the services of AVTC were not accessible to the majority of Territorial residents. Indeed in analysis of enrollment of Baffin Region residents during the 1977-1982 period indicated that an average of five to nine percent of the AVTC students were from the Baffin Region. (Residents of the Baffin Region compose 18% percent of the overall N.W.T. population). In addition, an analysis of student success rates carried out by AVTC staff indicated that only 27% of enrolled Baffin residents were successfully completing their courses. (Enrollment figures for residents of the Keewatin and Kitikmeot regions for the same period were comparable although student success rates were somewhat higher).

#### C) Education Decision Making

The growing recognition that the adult training strategy needed reassessment was matched by increasing public pressures regarding the K-12 program. The passage of the Northwest Territories Education Ordinance in 1977 had





formalized a structure through which residents could, at the community level, actively influence the delivery of the education program. In some areas of the N.W.T. education authority members soon felt that additional responsibilities and power were required to effectively influence education policy and programming. This growing public awareness of the education system and the program it offered led to the formation of the Legislative Assembly's Special Committee on Education in 1980.

While the Special Committee was carrying out its research development regarding the establishment of a college system continued. The Executive Council of the Northwest Territories Government, having decided to establish the college through policy, began by declaring AVTC a college in May of 1981. Other actions followed. These included:

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1. May 1981 In addition to declaring AVTC a college, the principle of a core campus at Fort Smith with other future, satellite campuses was approved.
  2. August 1981 The Minister of Education was directed by the Executive Council to appoint a Board of Governors for the College.
  3. October 1981 The name Thebacha College was approved



4. February 1982 The members of the Board of Governors were appointed.
5. March 1982 The Special Committee on Education's final report was tabled.
6. December 1982 A second campus of the college system was declared (Frobisher Bay) by the Executive Council.
7. May 1983 A strategic planning exercise was authorized for Thebacha College by the Executive Council.
8. August 1983 The Task Force on Implementation of the Special Committee's Recommendations supported the creation of a diversified college system.
9. September 1983 The strategic planning study was completed and submitted. Multiple campuses and distance learning were encouraged in the report.
10. April 1984 The training services of the Government of the N.W.T. were amalgamated within the Department of Education.
11. May 1984 Approval by the Executive Council was given for the Department of Education to bring forward policy on the development of a college system.





12. August 1984 The Executive Council gave approval to the mandate of the college as established in the Strategic Plan. The name of the College was changed to the Arctic College. Approval was given to draft legislation which would define the colleges role(s) and authority.
13. October 1984 A Vice-President was appointed to direct the development of the Frobisher Bay Campus.

The territorial-wide trends to increase the public accountability of the education system have been major factors in the continued development of the college. The aggressive stance of the current Minister of Education, the Honourable Dennis Patterson, has assisted in the continuing definition of public participation and authority in the college, K-12 and community adult education programs.

#### V CONTINUING DEVELOPMENTAL ISSUES

While the groundwork to establish a N.W.T. College system has been established a number of issues remain to be addressed. During the next several years decisions will be made which will affect both the form and the effectiveness of the Arctic College.

From among the decisions to be made, several key issues can be identified. Decisions in these areas will provide the framework for operational activities. Three decision-making





bodies will be involved in the resolution of these key issues.

A) N.W.T. Government (Executive Council)

1. Level of Commitment:

The primary decision faced by the legislators will be the level of commitment and priority which will be given to the Arctic College. Decisions regarding commitment will be indicated through the establishment of base funding levels: the passage of legislation which enunciates the college's mandate and authority; and the approval of increased program offerings.

2. Campus Development:

A second issue will be the rate at which additional college campuses are approved and funded.

B) Arctic College Board of Governors

1. Type and Priority of Programs:

The Board of Governors is currently faced with a number of decisions related to the types of programs which will be offered. Competition for funding from certificate and diploma courses best illustrates the issue.

2. Delivery Format:

An emphasis on extension programming and distance education has been specified by the Board. However,



commitments of funding and expertise will indicate the degree to which this delivery method will be utilized. Active pursuit of extension and distance education will indicate an interest in further decentralization of college programs.

C) Arctic College Administration

1. Development of Arctic College Credibility:

A key issue facing the senior administration is the establishment of college credibility throughout the N.W.T. Decisions in this area will be indicated in several ways including the establishment of programming content and delivery which reflects the unique aspects of the Northwest Territories; development of student services to match the requirements of various regions; public relations efforts and the establishment of student registration policies which encourage participation by residents from throughout the N.W.T.

The issues listed above and the decisions which are the result will strongly influence the character of the Arctic College system. No particular priorities have been placed upon the choices to be made. However, it is suggested that all of the issues must be resolved before the Arctic College will be firmly established.





## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The educational systems of the Northwest Territories have undergone major reformation in the past ten years. While the prime attention has, historically, been given to the K-12 program, the growing importance of adult training has served to alter the focus of the public and legislators to include post-secondary training. The concept of the Arctic College has evolved as a direct result of the increased attention on the adult training services.

The characteristics of the concept recognize the unique and complex factors which affect the delivery of college programs in the N.W.T. Further, the development of the Arctic College system provides an opportunity for northerners to become directly involved in the governance of the college system by which they are served.

The Arctic College is in its infancy. Decisions related to its final structure and purpose have yet to be made. Nevertheless, the first critical steps have occurred. The establishment of college campuses in the eastern and western portions of the N.W.T., the approvals which have been given for the development of supporting legislation and the actions of the Board of Governors will lead the way in the delivery of college programs in the Northwest Territories.





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